



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

### Fish and Wildlife Service

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#### FORMER ARMY BASE BECOMES WILDLIFE REFUGE: HAVEN FOR HUNTERS, FISHERMEN AND OUTDOOR RECREATION

Bald eagles soar above bottomland hardwood forests where tanks once rolled, and birdwatchers soon will stroll where soldiers in foxholes waited for opposing armies to engage in mock battles.

Some 8,100 acres of Fort Meade, an Army base in Maryland, has recently become part of the National Wildlife Refuge System, administered by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

At a dedication ceremony on April 3, 1992, Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan joined Secretary of the Army Michael Stone to officially mark the transfer.

"We are turning an area once necessary for national defense into a place of natural tranquility, a place where nature can resume its peaceful course," said Lujan.

The transfer, authorized under the Military Construction Appropriations Act of 1990, officially took place in October. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service added the acreage to its 4,700-acre Patuxent Wildlife Research Center.

Unlike Patuxent's original research lands, where public access traditionally has been limited to minimize disturbances to wildlife research projects, the new area is being opened to hunters, fishermen, and other forms of outdoor recreation.

The Service is to expand public recreational opportunities on the land to include hiking, wildlife observation, environmental education, and other activities.

"The land transfer is a good deal for everyone," said Mike Hayden, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. "The scientists receive a brand new outdoor laboratory and the public gets a great place in which to enjoy the outdoors."

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"The mock battleground is to be an area dedicated to scientific study and outdoor recreation," said John Turner, Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service. "Fort Meade will become a monument to the science of life and natural resource interpretation."

Turner pointed out the acquisition coincides with the Service's efforts to open Patuxent to visitors. This will involve construction of the world's first wildlife research visitor center and a fishing pier at a nearby lake.

When the \$18 million visitor center is completed next year, the public will learn first-hand from Service biologists about research -- past and present -- at the historic facility. Highlights include discovering damage the pesticide DDT was causing to eagle populations in the 1960s and the first captive propagation of endangered whooping cranes.

"When people stand awed by the majestic flight of a bald eagle, it is important for them to know protecting wildlife doesn't happen by accident," Turner said. "The hard work done by biologists such as those at Patuxent plays a big role."

The 8,100-acre tract, to be known as the North Tract, nearly triples the size of the research center and will allow Patuxent scientists to greatly expand their work. Nearly 30 research projects, ranging from global change to additional work on lead poisoning of waterfowl, are being considered.

With this transfer, the research center, the adjacent Beltsville Agricultural Research Center and the Goddard Space Flight Center encompass more than 20,000 acres of open space, the largest single tract of undeveloped land on the coastal plain between New Jersey and Richmond, Virginia.